

Good Friday 2024: Suffering Saviour

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[0 : 00] Let me open in prayer. Our dear Heavenly Father, Lord, we come to you this morning. Even as we worship you, even as we remember what you have done on Good Friday, Lord, help us to never let the familiarity with the events of Good Friday cause us to lose that sense of awe, that sense of indebtedness to you, that as we come to you, that it is not just mere rituals and traditions, but it is indeed that we are amazed at your love, that you have come to this world to die for our sin, unworthy sinners like us.

And we ask that this morning that your Spirit will work in our hearts, that we will respond in faith to your Son and obedience to your Son, that we will treasure and trust Him above all else.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. There is something about superheroes that fascinate all of us, whether we are young or old.

We have superheroes from cartoons like Power Rangers or Japanese animes like Dragon Ball, One Piece.

Some of us may be friends of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, some of us DC Comics. And feeling out as Malaysians, we had to come up with our very own Chichak Men.

[1 : 46] The Merriam-Rabster Dictionary define superheroes as a fictional hero having extraordinary or superhuman powers.

And we know normally, how does all this storyline of this superhero story go? Some ordinary people face some danger, and then the superhero comes to save the day.

And these superheroes would normally make a grand entrance. They will face some resistance from the villains, but in the end, they will prevail.

And this is the kind of superhero, the kind of saviour that we want. Powerful, eye-catching, outstanding, ordinary humans with superhuman powers.

And that is what we are constantly told, that salvation is not found in looking to God, but it is found in looking to ourselves, inside of us.

[2 : 57] Because as sinful humanity, we want to write our own story. We want to be the master of our own destiny. We want to be our own saviour.

And even as we read just now in the scripture reading, to just give some background of the book of Isaiah, during Prophet Isaiah's time, Israel was living in very dark times.

Isaiah lived to see the destruction, the captivity of the northern kingdom by the mighty Assyrians.

Now Judah, the southern kingdom, also faces the same threat.

But what we see from the book of Isaiah, that this is not the people's biggest problem. the biggest problem that they are facing, is that they have sinned against God.

The attack of the Assyrians against them, is ultimately God's judgment upon Israel. But instead of turning back to God, what did they do?

[4 : 10] They turned to the nations around them for help. They trusted in what they have, and what they can do. at the end of chapter 39, Prophet Isaiah told King Hezekiah that Judah would ultimately be taken into exile by the Babylonians in the future.

And so, the picture that is painted for us is a very dark and gloomy picture, a picture of judgment. But then, God gives glimpses of hope.

In chapter 40, it begins with, comfort, comfort my people, says your God. And God tells them in Isaiah 52, verse 9 to 10, which is on the slide, break forth together in singing, into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted His people.

He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared His holy arm before the eyes of all the nations and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

So, the question is, how will the arm of the Lord bring about salvation? And in Isaiah 40 to 55, we are introduced to the servant, to the servant who will rescue His people.

[5 : 40] And our passage this morning is the high point, is the climax of this whole section. It is a carefully crafted poem where you can see it's divided into three sections, into five sections with three verses.

And let's unpack this together. Let's see what God has to say to us. In the first point, in verse 13 to 15, Behold, my servant shall act wisely.

He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. The first section begins with this declaration of the servant acting wisely.

Acting wisely here has the idea of succeeding, of prospering. That's why in NASB translation, it is translated as my servant shall prosper.

It carries the tone of victory. And this victorious tone actually flows from verses 7 to 12. God will bring salvation.

[6 : 48] How? Through His chosen servant. And we see the same tone at the end of Isaiah 53. So at the beginning of this poem, at the end of this poem, the same triumphant tone.

Why? Because there is no doubt about the outcome of the servant's work. It will surely be victorious. He will surely be exalted.

But what is the astonishing part? It's the part between verse 13 to the end. As you look at verse 14, as many will astonish at you, I'm reading from the ESV version for this one, His appearance was marked beyond human semblance and His form beyond that of the children of mankind.

This description of the servant does not fit into the world's idea of a victorious saviour like Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan or Napoleon.

He does not look like the superheroes we read about that we watch. He looked unimpressive, humanly speaking. He does not even look like a normal human based on these words.

[8 : 17] And that is because of the suffering and the torture he will go through. When people look at him, many will be asking, how can he be possibly the promised saviour from God?

And Isaiah then connects verse 14, as many will astonish at you, and to verse 15, so shall he sprinkle many nations.

based on the external appearance of the servant, based on human eyes, the suffering servant does not look like a potential candidate to save Israel.

Yet, the paradox of this description is that because of his great and extreme suffering, he is then able to save his people.

and the word sprinkle is giving a picture of what the Israelite priests used to do. The sprinkling of blood and the water of purification was used to make the unclean people clean again, to be able to enter God's presence.

[9 : 30] And this reveals the priestly ministry of the servant. He can save us because he suffered. And in verse 15, kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them, they see, and that which they had not heard, they understand.

The people, the rulers of this world, they will be speechless. Why? Because in all of human history, this is a triumph.

that has never been seen or heard. It is a story that no sinful human and proud humanity will ever write because it is so humiliating and humbling.

But that is exactly the point. As you look at verses in Isaiah verse 55, chapter 55, verse 9, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

In 1 Corinthians 1 verse 25, for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

[10 : 55] God's ways are not our ways. He does not seek to appeal to man's wisdom wisdom. Because in the end, the suffering servant becomes the saviour we all desperately need.

The next section, in part 2, the rejected saviour. We are told that this unconventional saviour will be rejected by the very ones he came to save.

in verse 1, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

Although the suffering servant has been revealed as the arm of the Lord that will bring salvation, yet many would still choose not to believe this message.

In Romans 10 verse 16, But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message?

Many people who lived in Jesus' time, saw what Jesus did, heard what Jesus thought, they did not believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

[12:12] And why is that so? If man were to come up with this message, the Savior would not be born in a manger.

He would not be brought up by a carpenter. Instead, most likely he would be born of a king, born in a palace, known for his warrior skills, his military strategies, his outstanding intelligence.

He would be charismatic, strong, and popular. But here, we see God painting a totally different picture of his chosen servant.

In verse 2, he grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

There was nothing humanly spectacular about the servant. his appearance had nothing to make people feel that he is the promised savior.

[13:22] And therefore, people's response to him is that they will despise him, they will reject him, they distance themselves from him because he was a man of sorrows, familiar with pain.

in the eyes of the world, a mighty savior is not one who rides into the city on a donkey.

A mighty savior is one who rides on a great white horse with a great army ready to destroy the enemy. A mighty savior is not one who dies a humiliating death of a criminal alongside with criminals.

He is not one who allows himself to be insulted and does nothing about it. That is not the savior we want.

Remember when Jesus was hanging on the cross? We look at Luke chapter 23 verse 35. The people stood watching and the rulers even sneered at him.

[14:32] They said he saved others. Let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the chosen one. How can this man be our savior if he can't even save himself from suffering, from death?

death? For many, it was shameful to be associated with Jesus as he suffered and died. Even many and most of Jesus' disciples ran away hiding as Jesus was on the cross.

And as we read the account of Jesus' death, and just now as we sing the songs, a lot of times as we remember the events of Good Friday, we tend to distance ourselves from the religious leaders who plotted his death, or the soldiers who tortured Jesus and mocked at him, or his disciples who abandoned him.

We think we wouldn't treat Jesus like that if we were living in Jesus' time. But the reality is that many, many people who saw Jesus with their very eyes, saw the miracles he did, known him personally, like his half-brothers, they also did not believe him initially.

The people from his hometown couldn't go beyond their prejudices and their familiarity to see Jesus for who he really is.

[16:05] In our spiritual deadness, we too cannot see Jesus for who he really is. We will reject Jesus just as they did. We are not saved because we are better people.

We are smarter people. We are wiser people. No. It is only because of God's sovereign grace that our spiritual eyes are opened through the Spirit's working.

In the next section, part three, the sin-bearing saviour. The servant will be the sin-bearing saviour. from verses four onwards, we will see that though Jesus may not be the saviour, sinful humanity wants, he may not be the saviour that humans expect, but he is indeed the saviour we need.

Verses four, surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. Yet we consider him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

but he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him.

[17:22] By his wounds, we are healed. Verse four begins with the word surely. He's trying to contrast between the response of people to the suffering servant and his actual effectiveness God.

God redeems through his chosen servant who is a man of sorrows. But verse four and five makes it even more shocking or astonishing.

Normally in our human eyes, bad things happen to bad people. Good things happen to good people. people. But we see here that the servant, that Jesus did not suffer because he did something wrong.

Instead, it was our iniquities. It is our transgressions, our guilt, our punishment, our shame, all laid on Jesus as he died on the cross.

We are the guilty ones. We are the ones who are supposed to be on the cross bearing the judgment, the wrath of God. But he became our substitute.

[18 : 42] He took our place on the cross. And this whole concept of substitution is one that has been introduced by God in the Old Testament law through the sacrificial system.

Because God is holy, sin must be dealt with, justice must be served, and so the sacrificial system was a temporary gracious provision of God to deal with people's sin.

The sacrifice animals were offered by the high priest to take the place of sinners. But what we notice throughout the whole Old Testament is that this sacrifice is repeated again and again because it cannot deal with our sins ultimately.

It was meant to point us to the perfect, to the final sacrifice who would take our place as sinful men. And that's why in Hebrews 9 verse 25 and 26, nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again the way the high priest enters the most holy place, every year with blood that is not his own.

[20 : 04] Otherwise, Christ would have to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

That Jesus, the great high priest, he becomes the sacrifice himself. It was his blood that was shed on the cross. Our sins put Jesus on the cross.

In verse 6, we all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The wounds that are inflicted on Jesus, the blood that he shed was for lost and foolish sheep like us. Sheep who stubbornly go our own way, thinking we know better to save ourselves, who turn our backs against our good shepherd.

Sheep who could do nothing and contribute nothing to our salvation. salvation. And this is indeed the demonstration of God's amazing love in Romans 5 verse 8.

[21 : 20] But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, while we were still far away from God, enemies of God, Christ died for us.

Jesus is our sin bearing saviour. But how is it that this suffering servant can bear the weight of our sin and judgement?

Why only he can be the substitute and no one else? That's where we will look at the fourth part, verses 7 to 9, because he is the innocent saviour.

verse 7. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

By oppression and judgement he was taken away, yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of my people, he was punished.

[22 : 39] So, Prophet Isaiah continues with this sheep imagery in verse 7, but this time in verse 7, it is not an image of a wandering sheep picturing his wayward, sinful people.

Instead, it is a picture of a submissive sheep who submits to sacrificial death. Even though the servant is being oppressed, being mistreated, as we read in verse 7, two times it is mentioned, he did not open his mouth.

This is not to say that Jesus did not speak at all during his arrest, during his trial, during his death. There were times that he would answer, there were times that he would say something.

But if you notice, most of the time, Jesus was silent. Even Caiaphas, the high priest, even Pilate, the governor, they were taken aback by his silence.

Why didn't Jesus retaliate during the whole unfair and unlawful trial? Even Pilate himself knew that Jesus was innocent.

[23 : 54] He said, I have no basis of any charge against him. And yet, Jesus had to die the humiliating public death of a criminal. Jesus did not protest.

Jesus did not fight for his freedom. He was like a lamb led to the slaughter. And not only that, in verse 9, he was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death.

Though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. he died the shameful death of a criminal.

And now, he's not buried with the saints. He's not buried with martyrs. He's buried with the wicked rich. And we hear this whole description of the servant.

Doesn't it sound as though Jesus is a helpless victim in the hands of wicked men? man. But as we read just now, in the Bible reading, in John chapter 19 verse 10 and 11, Pilate said to Jesus, do you refuse to speak to me?

[25 : 07] Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you? Jesus answered, you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

or when Peter preached to the Jews in Acts chapter 2 verse 23, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. In God's great love, he chose to die for sins he did not commit. Jesus suffered for the judgment he did not deserve.

Only he can bear our sin because only he is the innocent perfect sacrificial lamb of God. And as the Apostle Peter puts it in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 22 and 23, he describes about Jesus, he committed no sin, no deceit was found in his mouth.

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

[26 : 24] Even as we put our trust in the suffering servant for our salvation, we are also called to walk in his footsteps, to be his suffering servants in this world.

Jesus told us that in this world, we will have trouble. If the world hates me, it will hate you also. And even as we suffer injustice, mistreatment in this sinful, fallen world, isn't it so tempting to take things into our own hands, to repay evil with evil?

The world thinks that we are weak, that we are naive when we choose to trust in God and not retaliate. but it is only then that we truly shine as bright light of God's love in this dark and lost world, that this ability to repay evil, not with evil, but with good, to forgive even our enemies, does not come from ourselves, but it comes from God.

And now to the last part, in verse 10 to 12. he further expands. Why is it that Jesus suffered even though he is innocent?

In verse 10, it tells us that it is the Father's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, to make his life an offering for sin.

[27 : 59] In the King James Version, it is translated as yet he pleased the Lord to bruise him. In other words, it was God's plan from eternity past to redeem sinful humanity through his Son.

But many people struggle with this truth because it makes God sound as though he is a cosmic child abuser, as a lot of atheists would protest.

There is one illustration that is often used in churches to explain the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. I think many of us may have heard of this.

A father is in charge of lowering down a bridge so that the train can cross the bridge. And then his son went down to play near the river and suddenly he got stuck in the gears of the bridge.

Then the train comes nearer, packed with passengers, and now the father has to make a choice. Will he save his son or will he rescue the passengers in the train?

[29 : 09] And so in the end, the illustration ends with that the father decides to crush his son in the gears to save the people in the train.

Despite all the good intentions of this illustration, a big problem of it is that Jesus is pictured as an unwilling victim of the whole redemptive plan of God.

As though Jesus had no choice, he was forced to because God the father wanted him to do so and to be crushed. But the reality is that Jesus as a person in the triune God, he willingly laid down his life.

He do it because he loves us, he do it ultimately in submission and in obedience to the father's will. In John chapter 10 verse 17 and 18 the reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again.

No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay down and authority to take it up again. This command I receive from the father.

[30 : 28] Why did it please the father to crush his son? It is because his suffering his death will bring life to us to sinful humanity.

As we continue in verse 10 and 11 he will see his offspring and prolong his days. The will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many. he will bear their iniquities. At the beginning of the poem we are told the servant will act wisely, the servant will prosper, will succeed

in doing God's will.

For the Israelites during Isaiah's time, what is success? For them it is having a human king rise up, deliver them from the Assyrians, deliver them from their enemies.

What is success for the Jews in Jesus' time? It is to be set free from the oppression of the Romans, from the rule of the Romans. They wanted a military general, they wanted a human king to lead them free from all these enemies.

[31 : 51] They didn't want a savior who would die a humiliating death of a criminal on the cross. today, what is success?

Success is having wealth and health. What people want today is that whatever that can give them a comfortable, a convenient life, a life free from problems, free from pain.

But God kept showing through the prophet Isaiah, our biggest problem is not the weakening ringgit. It is not our economy, it is not politics, it is not military threats and wars, it is not even health problems. Our biggest problem is that we have sinned against the true and living God.

In Isaiah 59 verse 1 and 2 Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God.

[33 : 02] Your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear. The saviour we desperately need is the suffering servant.

And what did his suffering and death produce? We are told in verse 10, offsprings, the many who will be justified by his saving work on the cross, and what seemed to be a failure, to be a defeat in the eyes of the world, became the greatest victory of all time.

Jesus endured the cross. He scorned its shame because he sees the light of victorious joy set before him, the satisfaction of pleasing the father, the satisfaction of making unworthy sinners like us right with God.

And now in verse 12, prophet Isaiah summarizes the whole poem. Once again, he didn't want his hearers to miss the whole point of the poem.

the father giving his son the portion among the strong, dividing the spoils with the strong, is a picture of total victory over the enemy because the spoils always belong to the victor.

[34 : 31] In other words, from beginning to the end, Jesus is and has always been the victor. he was never the victim.

His victory was not by using brute force like kings, like powerful people in the world. Remember in the Bible we read that Caesar counted the people in his empire, took a census.

But Jesus, our suffering servant, the suffering servant, he became one of his people to show indeed his greatness and his goodness. He did it by becoming one of us.

He did it by his sacrificial selfless suffering. But the truth is this, if Good Friday ended without Easter Sunday, Jesus' heroic act would be at most noble, admirable, but futile.

Good Friday would not be called good. As Apostle Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15, 17, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins.

[35 : 51] But we know, brothers and sisters, that Jesus indeed rose from the dead on the third day, and he now sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us, praying for us.

And that's why in Hebrews 7, 25, 26, therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

Such a high priest truly meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

we have seen that the arm of the Lord has been revealed. The saving work of the suffering servant is now finished.

And now the invitation has been proclaimed. Isaiah 55, verse 6 and 7. Seek the Lord or he may be found.

[36 : 55] Call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will freely pardon.

The question for us this morning, will we continue to trust our idols of money, of possession, of power, of worldly wisdom?

What are we turning to for our satisfaction? for our security? For our salvation? Is it our achievements? Is it our ability? Is it our good deeds?

Is it the things of this world? Or will we instead trust completely in the finished work of the suffering servant? If we have received this great salvation from God, how then should we live our lives? I remember seeing outside in your church's LED sign board, it says something like this, did you know that nearly one in two Sarawakians claim to follow Jesus?

[38 : 11] What does it mean to actually follow Jesus? I know that the sermon series you all have been going through is about being on team Jesus. And so often as Christians, we see crosses on church buildings.

Many people would wear a cross around their neck. Many will put stickers on their car. Jesus adds colour to my life. Or it is I am blessed because of Jesus.

I am pretty sure we have seen those stickers before. Yet many would also come out with our own version of Christianity.

A crossless Christianity. One that we follow God on our terms. We serve God at our own convenience. Many treat Jesus as though he is a vending machine.

He is a genie in a lamp whose purpose is to make my life happy, to give me my dream life. Many want Jesus to come and do a make over on their lives, to add some decorations to improve our lives.

[39 : 26] But we don't want Jesus to take over our lives as king and master. Does this describe us? Every Good Friday, we sing of this amazing salvation, that we are saved by God through his son.

But let us pause for this morning to ask ourselves, what are we saved from? And what are we saved for? In 1 Peter 2, verse 24, Apostle Peter writes this, he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed. He saved us from sin, from its curse, from its control. He saved us for us to become his holy people, for us to no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died for us and rose again.

Our suffering servant saviour died on the cross to save us so that we might take up our cross daily and follow him.

Brothers and sisters, what is the cross to us? For the world outside, the cross is no more than just a religious symbol. Jesus is not the saviour they want.

[41 : 00] He's not the saviour they think they need. And in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 18, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it the power of God.

The cross is precious to us because it is the power and the wisdom of God to save. The cross shows to us that we are great sinners, all of us, but Jesus is a greater saviour, that our sins are many, but his mercy is more.

The cross of Christ is a call to all of us to come and die, come and die to sin. It is a call to share in his suffering because we too will share in his glory when he returns.

the cross shows that there is no other way a holy God, a loving God could reconcile us back to himself. Let us faithfully preach this gospel.

Let us faithfully live it out every day of our lives as we go back to our Mondays to Saturdays in our workplaces, in our homes, in our schools because only this gospel can save.

[42 : 25] Let's pray. Our dear Heavenly Father, we are deeply humbled and grateful for what you have done on the cross for our sin.

Lord, so often we take it for granted, so often we are impressed with our own goodness rather than being amazed at your great love. Lord, we pray that this morning that we will respond, that we respond in worship, not just songs of worship, but the life of worship, that in every part of our lives, we want to honor you, we want to live for you because this life is not our own.

It was bought with the precious blood of Christ and we ask that you help us to do so, faithfully help us to do so, to the end while we wait for your glorious appearing, the appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.